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# *Firefly*

"Shindig"

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FIREFLY

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"Shindig"

TEASER

1 INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT (NIGHT 1)

1

It's dark, smoky. Four tables are in play. There are about 15 people in here, mostly men. A BARTENDER serves beer in heavy wooden bowls. Small tables line the edges of the room.

MAL and JAYNE play two other men, WRIGHT and HOLDER. INARA, in a beautiful outfit, watches and holds a small glass of pink liqueur. She is the only color, only elegance.

WRIGHT is lining up a shot and talking at the same time. His cue has a ring of light right before the tip.

WRIGHT

Didn't hardly have to convert the ship, even.

(re: shot)

Six in the corner. Stronger locks, thicker doors, keep everybody where they're s'posed to be. Don't even need more rations.

As he sights along his cue, all the balls on the table flicker, disappearing for a moment, then reappearing. A general DISGUSTED GROAN comes from every player in the room.

WRIGHT (cont'd)

< Hey! > [Way!]

He looks toward the Bartender, as do other patrons. The Bartender points, bored, to a crude Sign: "MANAGEMENT NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR BALL FAILURE" (It also says it in Chinese.)

Wright attempts his shot, Doesn't sink the ball.

WRIGHT (cont'd)

Flicker threw me off.

Mal's turn. He walks around, examines the table.

JAYNE

(to Wright)

You made money?

(CONTINUED)

WRIGHT

Hand over fist, my friend. Border planets need labor. Terraforming crews got a prodigious death rate.

MAL

Side pocket.

Mal makes his shot, lines up another.

MAL (cont'd)

Labor. You mean slaves.

WRIGHT

They wasn't volunteers, for damn sure.

MAL

That why you didn't hafta to lay in more rations?

WRIGHT

I didn't hear no complaints.

Wright and Holder laugh.

JAYNE

How much money? Lots?

Mal misses a shot and steps back by Inara. She's brushing cigarette ashes off a chair, making a place to sit.

MAL

There's a chance you may wanna head back to the ship.

INARA

Oh, I'm all right. This is entertaining, actually.

MAL

(amused, disbelieving)  
Yeah? What's entertaining?

INARA

I like watching the game. As with other situations, the key seems to be giving Jayne a heavy stick and standing back.

ANGLE ON: Jayne, sinking one of the few remaining balls. Mal smiles at Inara, but:

(CONTINUED)

MAL

Still think you might oughtta  
clear out 'fore too much longer.  
Seems there's a thief about.

INARA

A thief?

Mal leans in close, slips Inara a handful of paper money.

MAL

He took this right off 'em. They  
earned that with the sweat of  
their slave-tradin' brows.

INARA

Mal!

MAL

Terrible shame. 'Course, they  
won't notice it 'til they go to  
pay for their next drink --

WRIGHT (O.S.)

Hey! [Way!]

MAL

(to Inara)

Good drinker, that one.

Wright's hand falls heavily on Mal's shoulder. Mal spins and  
LANDS A MIGHTY PUNCH.

Behind them, Holder jumps to help Wright. Jayne TACKLES HIM.

Inara jumps back against a wall, as Wright KICKS MAL'S LEGS  
from under him. Mal falls.

Holder is up again, swinging a pool cue at Jayne.

Mal, on the floor, grabs the base of a small table and rams it  
UP at Wright. Wright flies back.

It's a melee. Other patrons jump to join.

Inara jumps when a GLASS SHATTERS near her head. She heads  
toward the door, fast. She passes the bartender as she goes.

INARA

(dryly)

Lovely place. I'll tell my  
friends.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

2 EXT. SERENITY / PERSEPHONE - EFFECT 2

Descending out of orbit over Persephone.

3 INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE - DAY (DAY 2) / EFFECT 3

WASH pilots Serenity closer to the surface. ZOE stands behind his chair, hand on Wash's shoulder, looking out.

As they approach, Persephone comes between them and this system's sun; the planet's shadow moves over their faces. Zoe bends down close to Wash, a couple enjoying a sunset.

WASH

It seem to you we cleared outta  
Santo in a hurry?

ZOE

Seems to me we do that a lot.  
Heard tell though, we're gonna  
stay a while on Persephone,  
upwards of a week maybe.

Wash whistles through his teeth.

WASH

Shiny.

ZOE

Yeah? Thought you'd get land-  
crazy, that long in port.

WASH

Prob'ly. But I been sane a long  
while now, and change is good.

Mal joins them. Looks out past them at the planet.

MAL

Well, ain't that a joyful sight.

WASH

Gotta love a sunset.

ZOE

Startin' to get familiar, too.  
Like a second home.

(CONTINUED)

MAL

(firmly)

Persephone is not home. Too many people we need to avoid. Resupply, look for work, move along. We sniff the air, we don't kiss the dirt.

ZOE

Wasn't planning on the dirt-kissing, Sir.

WASH

I wouldn't stand for it anyways, Captain. Jealous man like me.

(re: piloting)

Closin' in.

ZOE

Planet's coming up a might fast.

WASH

Just means I'm going down too quick. Likely crash and kill us all.

As Mal exits:

MAL

That happens, let me know.

Inara sits facing a Cortex screen that hangs on the wall like a mirror. There is local data across the top of the screen: "Persephone", the local time (10 am), ship's status (docked) The main part of the screen is labeled "Responses". The screen features 12 small pictures -- 10 men, 2 women. Text under each picture gives a name. Inara touches three pictures and they disappear.

Inara looks at the ones that remain. She touches one of the pictures and it expands to fill the screen. It's a taped request from a pale YOUNG HOPEFUL (man).

YOUNG HOPEFUL

(on tape, nervous)

I understand your time on our planet is limited. And if you've selected my proposal to hear, then the honor that you do me flatters my...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG HOPEFUL (cont'd)  
(searches for words)  
My honor... and I hope--

Inara taps the screen. The field of nine photos is back.  
Before she can select another, a CHIME sounds and the screen  
fills with the live (not recorded) image of ATHERTON WING.

Atherton is handsome, 30's with just enough charm to offset  
his aura of entitlement. Inara smiles at the sight of him.

ATHERTON  
(over the link)  
Now there's the smile made of  
sunlight.

INARA  
Atherton! How wonderful to see  
you.

ATHERTON  
Did you get my message? I was  
extra appealing.

INARA  
Yesterday. I listened to yours  
first. What a flattering  
invitation. I had no idea I was  
arriving in time for the Social  
Event of the Season.

ATHERTON  
We only have four or five of those  
a year, you know. So you'll  
accompany me, I ask, heart in my  
throat? There is a certain offer  
I'm still waiting to hear about.

SFX: KNOCK AT THE DOOR

INARA  
Yes, I imagine there is. I'm  
delighted to say I'll be there.  
Now, I'm sorry, Atherton, I have  
to run.

ATHERTON  
I understand, I'll see you soon, <  
sweetheart > [bao bay].

She severs the connection. His image freezes on the screen.

INARA  
Come in.

Mal enters. Inara sets the screen on a table.

(CONTINUED)

INARA (cont'd)  
Good afternoon, Captain.

MAL  
Morning. We're downing, and in  
case Wash don't kill us all, local  
time's gonna be in the a.m., ten  
or so.

INARA  
(why are you really here?)  
Yes, I saw that.

Mal gestures toward the screen, trying to seem casual.

MAL  
Making plans?

Inara tenses. He doesn't wait for an answer from her. He looks  
closely at the screen.

MAL (cont'd)  
"Atherton Wing". He's a regular,  
ain't he?

Inara blanks the screen.

INARA  
I've seen him before.

MAL  
Well, I never did. Not what I  
pictured. Young. Must be rich too,  
to afford your rates.

INARA  
I suppose. He has engaged me for  
several days.

MAL  
Days. The boy must have stamina.

INARA  
He does.

Mal tries not to look stung.

MAL  
Well... fine. Is he lettin' you  
out at all?

INARA  
Actually, we're attending a ball  
tomorrow night.

(CONTINUED)



MAL

Tell me, all the men there have to pay for their dates, or just the young rich ones with stamina?

INARA

Most of the women there will not be Companions, if that's what you're asking. Perhaps the other men couldn't attract one.

MAL

Huh. Sounds like the finest party I can imagine getting paid to go to.

INARA

I don't suppose you'd find it up the standards of your outings. More conversation and somewhat less petty theft and getting hit with pool cues.

Inara moves to the door, a clear invitation. to leave.

INARA (cont'd)

I understand, if you need to go prepare for that "it's ten in the morning" issue.

MAL

Yeah. Better do that. Cuz I think this is more of an evening look.

He exits.

Outside a line of shops on Persephone. KAYLEE, Zoe, Jayne, Wash and Mal are carrying some supplies back to the Mule.

The women and Wash walk ahead, then Jayne, then Mal. Mal carries a heavy burlap sack.

They pass a high-class dress shop. There are three live MODELS behind the electronic window, walking and posing, showing off their gowns. Kaylee stops short, and Zoe almost runs into her.

KAYLEE

Ooh. Look at the pretties.

Zoe looks, and Wash joins her.

(CONTINUED)

WASH

What am I looking at? The girls or  
the clothes?

Jayne stops short:

JAYNE

(immediately)

There's girls?

ZOE

(answering Wash,  
overlapping)

The clothes, please.

Jayne looks too. Mal is forced to stop, wait.

KAYLEE

(pointing)

Say. Look at the fluffy one.

ZOE

Too much foofaraw. If I'm gonna  
wear a dress, I want something  
with slink.

WASH

(quickly)

You want a slinky dress? I can buy  
you a slinky dress. Captain, can I  
have money for a slinky dress?

JAYNE

I'll chip in.

ZOE

(casually, to Jayne)

I can hurt you.

KAYLEE

Only place I ever seen something  
so nice is some of the things  
Inara has.

MAL

We'd best be movin'--

ZOE

Guess she needs all that stuff,  
life she leads.

(CONTINUED)

KAYLEE

Well, sure. And sometimes the customers buy her things. She knows some real rich men--

MAL

Come on. T'ain't feathers I'm toting here, you know.

KAYLEE

I like the ruffles. Inara gets to wear whatever she--

MAL

What would you do in that rig? Flounce around the engine room? Be like a sheep walkin' on its hind legs.

Jayne snorts a laugh at that. Kaylee's face shows she's hurt. Zoe shoots Mal a hard look. She takes Mal's burden effortlessly. She, Kaylee and Wash head o.s. toward the Mule.

ZOE

(coldly)

See you on the ship, Captain.

Mal instantly regrets what he said.

MAL

< Kick me in the bottom. > [Tee wuh duh pee-goo.]

JAYNE

Is she mad or something?

There's a series of meaningful CLICKS behind him.

Mal and Jayne turn to find themselves facing BADGER, a cockney criminal, a slice of local color with a fine hat.

Three of his LADS are with him, covering Jayne -- the clicks were the cocking of their guns. Mal nods politely, as if this is a normal way to run into an old acquaintance.

MAL

Badger.

BADGER

Captain Reynolds. Heard you was in town. Thought we might have a bit of a sit-down.

(CONTINUED)

MAL

I'd prefer a bit of a "piss off."

BADGER

I'm very sorry. Did I give you the impression I was asking?

INT. BADGER'S LAIR - DAY

Badger, Mal and Jayne sit uncomfortably around a cable-spool table. Badger pours tea. Jayne eats from a plate of cookies.

MAL

Seems to me, last time there was a chance for a little palaver, we were all manner of unwelcome...

JAYNE

(re: tea)

That's not bad.

BADGER

(to Jayne, confidentially)

There's a trick to it. Wood alcohol.

Mal continues as if he hadn't been interrupted.

MAL

Now, we're favored guests, treated to the finest in beverages that make you blind. So what is it you need?

Jayne pours himself more tea, reaching across Mal.

JAYNE

'Scuse me.

BADGER

There's this local, name of Warrick Harrow. He's got some property he wants to sell off-planet, to fetch a higher price.

MAL

But the local powers won't let him sell off-world.

(CONTINUED)

BADGER

It's a conundrum. What my man Harrow needs hisself, is a smuggler. 'M willing to cut you in on it.

MAL

Why me? You've got access to ships. You could do it yourself.

BADGER

(reluctant)

He won't deal with me direct. Taken an irrational dislike.

JAYNE

(mouth full)

What happened? He see your face?

BADGER

(ignoring Jayne)

He's a quality gent. Nose in the airlike he never < smelled a fart > [wun gwo pee]. Don't find me respectable. You, I figure, you got a chance.

MAL

You backed out of a deal, last time. Left us hanging.

JAYNE

Hurt our feelings.

MAL

You recall why that took place?

BADGER

I had a problem with your attitude, is why. Felt you was, what's the word?

JAYNE

Pretentious?

Mal shoots Jayne a look.

BADGER

Exactly. You think you're better'n other people.

MAL

Just the ones I'm better than.

(then)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAL (cont'd)

Now, I thinkin' that very quality  
is the one you're placing value on  
today.

BADGER

I place value on the fact that the  
stick up your < bottom > [pee-goo]  
is 'bout as large as the one  
Harrow's got.

Jayne barks a laugh at that. Mal shoots him another look.

MAL

How would you even set up a meet,  
man won't deal with you?

BADGER

I know a place he'll be. Safe  
place, using some new-tech gun  
scans. High class, too. They  
wouldn't let me in there, but you  
might slip by. 'Course you  
couldn't buy an invite with a  
diamond size of a testicle. But I  
got my hands on a couple.

Mal raises his eyebrows for a pregnant beat.

BADGER (cont'd)

(clarifying)  
...of invites. You want the  
meeting or not?

Mal considers.

BADGER (cont'd)

You want to do business in  
Persephone. you do it through me.  
But if you're so well off you  
don't need it...

Kaylee is working on the engine. Mal enters.

MAL

Kaylee.

She avoids his eyes, busies herself with her work. No answer.

MAL (cont'd)

Kaylee.

(CONTINUED)

KAYLEE

I'm not speaking to you, Captain.

MAL

Got no need to speak... C'mon.

He turns to go, matching her coldness.

MAL (cont'd)

Got a job for you.

INT. PARTY - FOYER - NIGHT (DAY 3)

Atherton Wing ushers Inara into the richly decorated foyer of a large public building. They are dressy and elegant.

ATHERTON

After you...

The ballroom is beyond, through an ornate arch -- there is no visible machinery associated with the arch. Two couples are in front of them, waiting to go through. A DECORATED OFFICIAL stands to the side of the arch.

ANGLE ON THE ARCHWAY

One couple passes through. A PORTER, his back visible through the arch, can be heard, slightly muffled, as he announces them to the room beyond.

PORTER

William and Lady Cortland.

The next couple, equally elegant, heads for the arch. The woman steps through, but the WELL-DRESSED MAN is held in place by something unseen.

A PLEASANT CHIME SOUNDS.

The Well-Dressed Man is not harmed, not struggling, but he can't move forward. He steps back, smiles at the Official.

WELL-DRESSED MAN

Terribly sorry. Oversight.

He removes a small pistol from a suit jacket pocket, hands it to the Official. He passes through the arch to join his date.

PORTER

Colonel Cyrus Momsen and escort.

Atherton and Inara step through.

9 INT. PARTY - BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

9

Atherton and Inara enter.

PORTER

Atherton Wing and Inara Serra.

We see the room now, filled with elegant party-goers, circulating waiters, live musicians, a buffet table...

Fresh food means money, so many of the decorations feature huge bowls of fruit. There is also a hovering chandelier.

Atherton and Inara move into the room. Inara waves at someone, exchanges air kisses with another woman.

INARA

Roberta, it's been too long.

She greets an elderly man sitting in a chair:

INARA (cont'd)

< You're looking wonderful, old friend >. [Lao pung yo, nee can chi lai hun yo jing shen]

They move on. Atherton talks softly into her ear.

ATHERTON

Half the men in this room wish you were on their arm tonight.

INARA

Only half? I must be losing my undefinable allure.

ATHERTON

Not that undefinable. All of them wish you were in their bed.

Inara finds that in bad taste. She looks away, changes the topic.

INARA

I'm looking for the boy with the shimmerwine.

ATHERTON

Oh, she blushes.

(considering)

Not many in your line of work do that. You, you are a singular woman and I find,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



ATHERTON (cont'd)

(stammering, sincere)

I find I admire you more and more.  
Inara stops and looks at him,  
touched. I'm trying to give you  
something, you know. A life. If  
you want it.

INARA

Atherton...

ATHERTON

You can live here, on Persephone.  
As my personal companion.

INARA

You are a generous man.

ATHERTON

That's not a "yes".

INARA

(after a beat)

It's not a "no" either.

Inara greets another acquaintance.

INARA (cont'd)

(to a woman)

You look gorgeous, dear.

Atherton spots a glass of champagne -- a waiter is passing  
with a tray. Atherton lifts the glass and offers it to Inara  
in one smooth move. She smiles, delighted.

ATHERTON

You belong here, Inara, not on  
that flying piece of < crap > [gos  
se]. You see that, don't you?

INARA

Atherton, language.

ATHERTON

What, "piece of < crap > [gos  
se]"? But it is a piece of < crap  
> [gos se].

PORTER (O.S.)

Miss Kaywinnit Lee Frye and  
escort.

Inara turns her head sharply and a little rudely away from  
Atherton, startled into looking at the door.

(CONTINUED)

INARA

Kaylee?

ON KAYLEE

She enters, eyes wide, soaking it all in. She wears the ruffled dress from the window and looks beautiful. She carries a glittery evening bag. She's Cinderella at the ball.

Mal steps forward to join her. He is in his Sunday best, something dark and Rhett Butler-y, maybe a cut-away coat.

ACROSS THE ROOM,

Inara stares, locking in on Mal.

INARA (cont'd)

Oh < crap > [gos se]

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

10 INT. PARTY FOYER - CONTINUING

10

Mal and Kaylee make their way into the party. Her eyes are bright and wide as she takes it all in at once. Mal is trying to look cool and cosmopolitan, but is actually almost as impressed as Kaylee. He tugs at his suit.

MAL

Does this seem kind of... tight?

KAYLEE

Shows off your backside. Didja see the chandelier? It's hovering

Mal looks up at the chandelier.

MAL

What's the point of that, I wonder?

KAYLEE

Ooh, pineapples.

Mal is still eyeing the chandelier.

MAL

I mean, I get how they did it. I just ain't seeing the why.

KAYLEE

These girls have the most beautiful dresses. And so do I, how 'bout that!

MAL

Well, careful with it. We cheated Badger outta good money to buy that frippery. You're s'posed to make me look respectable.

KAYLEE

Yes sir, Captain Tightpants.

Mal starts looking around, seeking someone out.

MAL

I'm looking for our guy, Harrow.

KAYLEE

And Inara. We should look for her, right? Just to hallo at her.

(CONTINUED)

MAL

(too casual)

If we see her. Think she's wearing green.

Kaylee is distracted by a passing group of attractive young men in fancy clothes.

KAYLEE

(to Mal, too loudly)

Say, lookit the boys!

Nearby party-goers glance over. Mal winces. Kaylee doesn't notice.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Some of them's pretty as the doctor.

She stares, struck speechless, as a waiter passes, carrying a huge BOWL OF ENORMOUS STRAWBERRIES to the buffet table.

MAL

Help me find our man. S'posed to be older, kinda stocky, wearing a red sash crossways.

Kaylee never takes her eyes off the strawberries.

KAYLEE

Why's he doing that?

MAL

Maybe he won the Miss Persephone pageant. Help me look.

KAYLEE

That him?

Mal looks where she's pointing, at the buffet table.

MAL

That's the buffet table.

KAYLEE

How can we be sure? You know, unless we question it?

MAL

Fine. Don't make yourself sick.

Kaylee flashes him a big smile.

(CONTINUED)

KAYLEE

< Thank you > [Sheh-sheh], Cap'n!

And she's off to the buffet. Mal heads off on his own.

11

INT. SERENITY COMMON AREA / KITCHEN - NIGHT

11

SIMON, BOOK and Jayne play Chore poker. It looks like five card draw, only instead of chips, they're playing for pieces of paper. Each man has a collection of scraps in front of him - Simon has the least and Book the most. Simon shuffles.

SIMON

Ante up, gentlemen.

(antes piece of paper)

Dishes.

BOOK

(anteing)

Dishes. Could do with less of them.

JAYNE

(anteing)

Garbage.

Simon completes the deal. The three men study their cards.

BOOK

I'll take two.

JAYNE

(re: his hand)

Speakin' of garbage.

(then)

Gimme three.

SIMON

And one for the dealer.

Simon gives out the cards.

BOOK

What do you s'pose the Captain and Kaylee are doing now?

(betting)

Septic flush.

JAYNE

Eatin' steaks off plates made a' solid money, like as anything. I fold.

(CONTINUED)

SIMON

Me too.

JAYNE

Take it, Shepherd.

BOOK

Thank you, gents. That's a nice  
pile of things I don't have to do.

The CAMERA FINDS River, sitting in the kitchen, next to a box  
of supplies. She takes the label off a can of peaches.

RIVER

There it is, there it is. It's  
always there if you look for it.  
Everybody sees and nobody sees  
it...

BACK AT THE GAME:

Jayne shuffles.

SIMON

The party is probably a buffet.  
And there'll be dancing. And  
beautiful women. Dozens of them.

JAYNE

And you can dance with any of 'em?

SIMON

Well, there are social  
conventions, ways of asking, ways  
of declining...

BOOK

It sounds very complicated. I'll  
never understand why it's  
considered a sacrifice to live a  
simple life.

JAYNE

Yeah. I wouldn't trade this for  
nothing, playing cards for a night  
off from septic flush duty.

IN THE KITCHEN,

River has three cans unlabeled, and she's crushing a box of  
crackers. It has a visible, not emphasized, "Blue Sun" on it.  
She gets more violent and loud as she continues.

(CONTINUED)

RIVER

These are the ones that take you!  
Little ones in the corner that you  
almost don't see. But they're the  
ones that reach in and do it.  
They're the ones with teeth and  
you have to smash them!

AT THE GAME,

River's ranting is audible now. Simon drops his cards and goes  
to her. Book follows.

SIMON

River?

BOOK

Is she hurt?

JAYNE

Better see to her.  
(called after)  
Bad habit for a fugitive. She's  
gonna do that in public some day,  
get herself hauled off.

Jayne moves a few exemptions from Book's pile to his own.

IN THE KITCHEN

Simon has an arm around River, calming her down. Book looks at  
the supplies. River rants the whole time.

SIMON

River, it's me. Calm down.

BOOK

She didn't harm much.  
(re cans)  
We'll have a few mystery  
meals.

RIVER

A million things, and the  
little ends of the roots go  
everywhere and when you brush  
your teeth or all the little  
blue things are there but no  
one says it because, because  
sometimes they're afraid. And  
then they come....

SIMON

River, it's okay. It's okay.

She winds down, stops talking. Book and Simon relax.

JAYNE (cont'd)

So, we gonna play cards, or we  
gonna screw around?

12 INT. ZOE AND WASH'S QUARTERS - SAME TIME

12

Wash and Zoe in a post-coital tangle, limbs and sheets, exhausted and happy.

ZOE

Thought you wanted to spend time off-ship this visit.

WASH

Seems like out there it's all fancy parties. I like our party better. The dress code's easier and I know all the steps.

Zoe's eyes are closing.

ZOE

I'd say you do, at that.

WASH

Don't fall asleep now. Sleepiness is weakness of character, ask anyone.

Zoe starts to laugh, her eyes still closed.

ZOE

It is not!

WASH

You're acting Captain. You know what happens, you fall asleep?

ZOE

Jayne slits my throat and takes over?

WASH

That's right

ZOE

And we can't stop it?

WASH

I wash my hands of it. Hopeless case. I'll read a nice poem at the funeral. Something with imagery.

ZOE

You could lock the door. Keep the power-hungry maniac at bay.

(CONTINUED)



WASH

Don't know. I'm starting to like this poetry thing. "Here lies my beloved Zoe, my autumn flower, somewhat less attractive now that she's all corpse-ified and gross...

Zoe hits him with a pillow.

Back at the party, Kaylee approaches an attractive BOY (early 20s) who is watching the dancers.

KAYLEE

(re dancers)

Aren't they something? Like butterflies or little pieces of wrapping paper, blowing around...

The boy turns toward her and bows politely and moves away. But there's too much going on for Kaylee to be disappointed.

She joins a group of four GIRLS her age and younger, standing and gossiping. She waits until a group-laugh subsides.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Hello!

One of the girls, BANNING, seems to be the queen bee. She looks at Kaylee in surprise.

BANNING

I don't... have we been introduced?

Kaylee grabs Banning's hand, shakes it with enthusiasm.

KAYLEE

I'm Kaylee.

BANNING

Banning. And this is Destra, Cabott, and Zelle.

KAYLEE

Don't you love this party? Everything's so fancy and there's some kind of hot cheese over there.

(CONTINUED)

CABOTT

It's not as good as last year.

KAYLEE

Really? What'd they have last year?

CABOTT

Standards.

Destra and Zelle giggle, but Banning looks sympathetic.

BANNING

You're not from Persephone, are you?

KAYLEE

I'm from Serenity. Neat little Firefly class. I keep the engines. She's a sweet runner.

BANNING

Uh-huh. Who made your dress, Kaylee?

KAYLEE

Oh, do you like it? When I saw the ruffles, I just couldn't--

BANNING

You ought to see to your girl.

KAYLEE

< What? > [Shah muh?]

BANNING

(confidential)

Your girl. She's not very good. She made you a dress looks like you bought it in a store.

The other girls giggle again, but Banning plays it off with a straight face.

KAYLEE

Oh. I... I didn't know...

BANNING

I'm only trying to help. No one wants you to look foolish...

A nearby guest, MURPHY, a kind-looking man in his 50s,. interrupts.

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY

(off-hand, for Kaylee's  
benefit)

Why Banning Miller, what a vision  
you are in that fine dress. Must  
have taken a dozen slaves a dozen  
days just to get you into that get-  
up. 'Course your daddy tells me it  
takes the space of a schoolboy's  
wink to get you out of it again.

Banning leaves, mortified. Her friends are suppressing  
giggles.

MURPHY (cont'd)

(to Kaylee)

Forgive my rudeness. I can not  
abide useless people.

SOME DISTANCE AWAY, MAL

Approaches HARROW, who is indeed wearing a red sash. Harrow is  
upper-crust, an acute observer with a strong code of behavior.  
He doesn't immediately take to rough-edged Mal.

MAL

Beg pardon, sir. But would you be  
Mr. Warrick Harrow?

It's a bad start.

HARROW

Sir Warrick Harrow. The sash.

MAL

The sash.

HARROW

It indicates lordhood.

MAL

And it's, it's doing a great job.

Harrow moves a few steps away, dismissing Mal. Mal has to  
follow.

MAL (cont'd)

Sir, my name is Malcolm Reynolds.  
I captain a ship, name of  
Serenity. I mention this because I  
have been led to understand you  
want to move some property off-  
world...

(CONTINUED)

Mal is distracted as INARA AND ATHERTON DANCE NEARBY. No one makes eye contact, but Mal and Inara are very aware of each other. Harrow observes this.

MAL (cont'd)  
... some property off-world,  
discreetly.

Harrow takes a closer look at Mal. Still not impressed.

HARROW  
You're mistaken, sir. I'm an  
honest man.

MAL  
Seems to me, there's nothing  
dishonest about getting your goods  
to people what need them.

HARROW  
You're concerned about the poor.  
And yet, for what you're offering,  
you'd want money, I imagine.

MAL  
Well, sir. I think you'll find  
that working with me is giving to  
the poor.

HARROW  
Whom is it you represent?

MAL  
"Represent" isn't exactly -

HARROW  
Don't waste my time.

MAL  
Fellow called Badger.

HARROW  
I know him. And I think he's a  
psychotic lowlife.

MAL  
And I think calling him that is an  
offense to the psychotic lowlife  
community. But the deal is solid.

Mal is startled by a touch on his arm. He turns, surprised to see Atherton there. Inara, unsmiling, is at his elbow.

(CONTINUED)

ATHERTON

Sorry to interrupt.

(a greeting)

Sir Harrow. I know you from the club, I believe.

Harrow nods, coolly.

INARA

(resigned)

Captain, this is Atherton Wing.

Atherton, Captain Mal Reynolds.

Atherton and Mal shake hands, sizing each other up.

MAL

Pleased to meet'cha. Inara, I didn't realize you were going to this party.

INARA

(icy)

It's the only party.

MAL

And I can see why. How 'bout that floating chandelier?

Atherton circles Inara's arm with his hand... a gesture that is both affectionate and possessive.

ATHERTON

How do you come to be here, Captain?

MAL

Oh I love a party. I was just telling that to my friend here.

ATHERTON

(to Harrow)

I didn't know you were acquainted.

HARROW

It is beginning to seem unavoidable.

Mal watches as Atherton's fingers shift on Inara's arm. We can see the white circle the pressure of his fingers has left. Mal sees that, makes a decision.

MAL

Ath. Can I call you Ath? Inara has spoken of you to me.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAL (cont'd)

She made a point of your  
generosity. Given that, I'm sure  
you won't kick if I ask Inara the  
favor of a dance.

Atherton hesitates, can't find a way out.

ATHERTON

Of course.

Atherton and Harrow end up standing side by side watching as  
Mal leads an angry Inara onto the dance floor.

HARROW

(to Atherton)

You're a brave man.

ATHERTON

(clipped)

I know what's mine.

Harrow scowls, disliking Atherton.

MAL AND INARA

On the dance floor.

INARA

Why are you here?

The music begins for their dance -- it's a courtly and  
complicated dance, rather Regency England in style. Mal  
watches the other couples. It's easy at first, lots of walking  
around each other.

MAL

Business, same's you. I was  
talking to a contact about a  
smuggling job, and you came over  
to me.

INARA

You were staring at me.

MAL

I saw you, is all. You stand out.

The dance takes them apart for a few beats, bowing and  
curtsying to other couples.

Mal starts to make his curtsy mistake as in the Train Job, but  
he corrects it. They come back together and now dance palm-to-  
palm.

(CONTINUED)

INARA

In this company, Captain, I believe you are the one who stands out.

MAL

Maybe I just like watching a professional at work, then. Is this the hardest part, would you say, or does that come later?

INARA

You have no call to try to make me ashamed of my job. What I do is legal, and how is that smuggling coming?

MAL

My work's illegal, but it's honest.

INARA

What?!

MAL

While this... the lie of it... that man parading you on his arm as if he actually won you, as if he loves you, and everyone going along with it. How can that not bother you?

INARA

"Going along with it"?

MAL

He treats you like an ornament. Other men look at you and discuss if you're worth the cost. The women talk behind their fans, picturing you with their husbands. And to your face, they're sweet as pie.

INARA

That's not true.

MAL

Well, I guess you'd know. It's not my world.

(CONTINUED)

INARA

These people like me, and I like them. I like Atherton too, by the way.

MAL

Well, sure, what's not to like? I'm liable to sleep with him myself.

INARA

And he likes me, whether you see it or not.

MAL

(dismissive)  
Of course.

INARA.

He's made me an offer.

Mal didn't expect that.

INARA

You may think he doesn't honor me. But he wants me to live here. I would be his personal Companion.

MAL

< Qow > [Wah!] That's as romantic as a marriage proposal. No wait, it's not.

INARA

It would be a good life, Mal. I could belong here. Call me pretentious, but there is some appeal in that.

Mal reacts to the word "pretentious," startled by it. Beat.

MAL

I.. You're right. I got no call to stop you.

Inara accepts that for the concession it is. Then:

INARA

I see Kaylee is here.

(CONTINUED)



MAL

Girl was crying Cinderella tears.  
shoulda seen her, when I said she  
could have that layer cake she's  
wearin'.

Inara relaxes a little.

INARA

I think she looks adorable.

MAL

Well, yeah, but I never said it.

KAYLEE

She's now surrounded by a group of gentlemen farmers, Murphy  
and his friends. Many of them are older, some young.

She's enjoying chocolate mints, talking with her mouth full.  
The men are laughing. The dialog overlaps as they debate:

KAYLEE

I'm not saying the eighty-oh-  
four's hard to repair, it just  
ain't worth it.

OLDER FARMER

It's a fine machine, keep it tuned-  
-

KAYLEE

< No way >. [Tsai boo shr] The  
extenders ain't braced.

MURPHY

(re: older farmer)  
We've been tellin' him buy an  
eighty- ten for years!

KAYLEE

(overlapping Murphy)  
Those 'tenders snap off, it don't  
matter how good the engine's  
cyclin'.

YOUNGER FARMER

(jumping in quick)  
Miss Kaylee, I wonder if I could  
request the honor of--

He's shouted down by the other men:

(CONTINUED)

FARMERS

Dance later!/She's talking./Let  
her talk.

KAYLEE

(to Murphy)

By the way, the eighty-ten's the  
same machine. They changed the  
plating, hoped no one'd notice!

If you knew these machines, oh, you'd find this hilarious. The  
men laugh, urging her on.

MAL AND INARA

The dance gets more complicated now, some tricky footwork.  
Inara and all the other dancers do it easily. Mal stumbles. He  
catches himself with hands around Inara's waist. As the music  
ends, he straightens himself out, grins at her.

MAL

Possible you were right before.  
This ain't my kind of a party.

Inara can't help herself and she smiles. Atherton is suddenly  
there. He's seen enough. He takes her back roughly, hauling  
her by the arm.

MAL (cont'd)

Watch yourself there. No need for  
any hands-on.

Guests, including Harrow, look at the public display.

ATHERTON

Excuse me. She's not here with  
you, Captain. She's mine.

MAL

Yours? She don't belong to nobody.

ATHERTON

Money changed hands. Makes her  
mine tonight. And no matter how  
you dress her up, she's still--

Without warning, Mal hauls off and PUNCHES ATHERTON, lays him  
right down on the floor. Mal smiles and looks to Inara.

MAL

Turns out this is my kind of a  
party!

Harrow looks impressed, watching everything.

(CONTINUED)

INARA

Oh, Mal...

MAL

What? Man was out of line--

ATHERTON

(as he rises)

I accept!

MAL

That's great. What?

GENTLEMAN

There has been a challenge!

Atherton is on his feet.

ATHERTON

I hope you're prepared, Captain.

MAL

You all talkin' 'bout a fight?  
Well, fine, let's get out of here!

INARA

It's not a fist fight, Mal.

GENTLEMAN

The duel will be met tomorrow  
morning, on Cadrie Hill.

MAL

why wait? Where's that guard? He  
collected a whole mess a' pistols--

GENTLEMAN

If you require it, any gentleman  
here can give you use of a sword.

MAL

Use of a... s'what?

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

14 INT. PARTY - CONTINUING

14

People are where we left them. Mal looks confused. Harrow, Inara and the ballroom full of people look on.

MAL

I laid the fellow out. Seems to me the transaction is complete. Also satisfying.

GENTLEMAN

Everyone, enjoy the party, please. There's no farther action here.

The crowd disperses, including Atherton, who moves away with an evil look at Mal. Kaylee separates herself from the crowd, moving in close to Mal.

KAYLEE

(to Mal)

What's going on?

MAL

Not rightly sure.

(to Harrow)

what's going on?

HARROW

Well, first off, you'll be put up in lodgings for the night, so you don't disappear. I wouldn't blame you, incidentally. Wing may be a spoiled dandy, but he's an expert swordsman. He's killed a dozen men with a longblade and you're the only one gave him a reason.

MAL

This is a joke.

INARA

And he'll need a second.

MAL

What's that?

HARROW

I'll take on the job.

INARA

He fights if you refuse--

(CONTINUED)

ATHERTON (O.S.)

Inara!

ANGLE ON ATHERTON: Waiting impatiently. She hesitates.

ATHERTON (cont'd)

Come with me, please.

MAL

(to Harrow)

You takin' this on, being my second. Does this mean we're in business?

Harrow chuckles.

HARROW

It means you're in mortal danger. But you mussed up Atherton's face and that has endeared me to you somewhat. You might even give him a fight before he guts you.

ATHERTON

Inara!

Inara tears herself away, eyes still on Mal. Finally she turns, goes to Atherton. Mal watches her go.

KAYLEE

(apologetically helpful)

Up 'til the punching, it was a real nice party.

Jayne is in the cargo bay, working out with those hanging rungs under the catwalk. His shotgun leans against a wall nearby.

He's interrupted by a loud metallic BANGING.

Jayne crosses and opens the door, (not the ramp, the door into the airlock) revealing Badger, holding a wrench. He's been banging on the door with it.

BADGER

(off-hand)

Your captain's gone and got hisself in trouble.

TIME CUT TO:

16 INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - DAY

16

Badger stands near the infirmary end of the cargo bay. The assembled crew, Zoe, Wash, Jayne, Simon, Book, are gathered around, back to the closed ramp. (River isn't there.)

BOOK

A duel?

WASH

With swords?

SIMON

The captain's a good fighter. He must know how to handle a sword.

Simon and Book look to Zoe hopefully.

ZOE

I think he knows which end to hold.

SIMON

All right. So now we just need to figure how to get him out of there.

BOOK

We have until the morning, correct?

(to Badger)

Do you know what lodging he's in?

BADGER

Oh, this is embarrassing. Some of you seem to be misapprehending my purpose in being here.

Zoe stands. It's suddenly clear that now, this is her ship.

ZOE

You're here to make sure we don't do what these men are keen on doing.

BADGER

Penny for the smart lady. Persephone's my home. I gotta do business with the people here. I don't want it known I brought someone in caused this kinda ruckus.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

16

CONTINUED:

16

BADGER (cont'd)  
We'll just settle in here 'til  
this blows over one way or t'other-

Jayne is suddenly there, at Badger's back, shotgun raised. He  
CRACKS BADGER OVER THE SKULL WITH IT.

Badger falls. Jayne points the gun at Badger's head.

ZOE  
(calm)  
Jayne. I wouldn't.

JAYNE  
Why not?

Zoe looks toward the doorway. Jayne follows the look...

ANGLE ON THE DOORWAY: FOUR OF BADGER'S LADS: all of them with  
guns. One of them has a scared Kaylee by the arm.

KAYLEE  
(small)  
Hi.

Jayne sags.

17

INT. LODGING - MALL AND ROOM - NIGHT

17

Inara slips quietly down a hallway, like a modern hotel hall,  
only with Chinese numbers on the doors. And, oddly, round  
SMALL HOLES INSTEAD OF DOOR KNOBS (the holes don't go all  
the way through the doors). She stops at a closed door.

Now we get to see how a hotel key works. She is holding a  
small metal sphere with a small protruding round shaft. The  
sphere is about 2/3 the size of a regular doorknob. She holds  
it near the hole in the door and magnets pull it in. THE SHAFT  
FITS INTO THE HOLE ON THE DOOR AND, THUS, THE SPHERE BECOMES A  
DOORKNOB! The mechanism hums and A SMALL LIGHT COMES ON. She  
turns it, unlocking and opening the door.

She enters quietly and we see the room, again, not too  
different from a modern hotel room. A sword lies on the bed.

Mal, suit coat off, shirt sleeves rolled up, stands, back to  
her, brandishing a sword with ridiculous flourishes.

Inara makes a noise and Mal JUMPS. He spins to see her. His  
sword swings, hits the wall and the tip embeds in the plaster.  
The sword hangs there.

MAL  
What are you doing here?

(CONTINUED)

He tugs at the embedded sword, trying not to be obvious.

INARA

Atherton's a heavy sleeper, night before a big day. He's got the killing you in the morning, then a haircut later.

MAL

It's such a comfort having friends visit at a time like this.

Mal tugs the sword free. Inara looks around the room.

INARA

I knew the accommodations would be nice. Atherton doesn't skimp.

MAL

Don't s'pose I like being kept by him s'much as others do. How come you're still attached to him?

INARA

Because it's my decision. Not yours.

MAL

Thought he made it pretty clear he's got no regard for you.

INARA

You did manage to push him into saying something, yes. Made a nice justification for the punch.

MAL

He insulted you. I hit him. Seemed like the thing to do. Why'd this get so complicated?

INARA

Well, it's about to get simpler. There's a back door. I have the desk clerk on alert. He'll let us out.

MAL

I'm not gonna run off.

Inara looks at him, surprised.

(CONTINUED)



MAL (cont'd)

No matter what you've got into your head, I didn't do this to prove some kinda point to you. I actually thought I was defending your honor. And I never back down from a fight.

INARA

Yes you do! You do all the time!

MAL

Yeah, okay. But I'm not backing down from this one.

INARA

He's an expert swordsman, Mal. You had trouble with that wall. How will your death help my "honor"?

MAL

But see, I'm looking to have it be his death. 'S why I need lessons.

Mal picks the other sword off the bed and throws it to her. She catches it expertly.

MAL (cont'd)

Figure you'd know how. Educated lady like you.

It's still a hostage situation here in the cargo bay.

Wash has his head down, trying to sleep. Book reads his Bible and prays silently.

Badger leans against the wall, eating a sandwich.

Jayne, Simon and Zoe talk quietly, pretending to play cards. Kaylee is bending over to talk to them.

KAYLEE

...but he said not to do anything.

He'll join us after he wins the duel.

JAYNE

And what if he don't win?

(CONTINUED)

ZOE

It doesn't hurt to have a contingency plan, Kaylee.

Kaylee moves away, unconvinced.

SIMON

I'm thinking; since we're unarmed, we should take them by surprise all at once.

ZOE

Not necessarily. We could lure one or two of 'em away, say, to the infirmary, take 'em out, be on Badger 'fore he knows what happened.

ANGLE ON THE DOORWAY FROM THE INFIRMARY: River appears. She looks blank and aimless. No one sees her, and the discussion continues.

JAYNE

Only if his attention's elsewhere. We need a diversion. I say Zoe gets nekkid.

Wash, without raising his head:

WASH

Nope.

JAYNE

I could get nekkid.

SIMON / ZOE / WASH

No!

Book looks up and sees River. He winces, but keeps his reaction small. He gets up casually and makes his way over to Simon. Book puts a hand on Simon's back.

SIMON

What?

BOOK

(whispers)

Don't look now. In the doorway.

ANGLE ON: River. She's stepped over the threshold now...

Simon tenses, starts to stand up.

(CONTINUED)

SIMON

I'll get her out 'fore he spots  
her.

Simon heads toward River. Badger doesn't look up. Simon is at  
her, hand on her arm...

ANGLE ON: RIVER AND SIMON.

SIMON (cont'd)

(whispers)

River. You can't be here...

RIVER

(whispers)

There's things in the air in  
there. Tiny things.

SIMON

Come on...

Simon tries to lead her back inside, but she pulls back,  
smiling a little, thinking it's a game.

RIVER

Pull, pull...

SIMON

River! Please!

BADGER (O.S.)

Who's this then?

Simon turns to see Badger, standing close. River avoids  
Badger's gaze, turning toward Simon for protection.

BADGER (cont'd)

Look at me. What's your story,  
luv?

River looks around, unfocused.

SIMON

She's just a passenger.

BADGER

(to Simon)

Yeah? Why ain't she talking? She  
got a secret?

SIMON

No, I'm sure not--

(CONTINUED)

RIVER

(in Badger's accent)

Sure, I got a secret. More'n one.

River raises her head, looks Badger in the eye. She's completely sane, unafraid, and she sounds like she's from his home town. She's also kinda pissed.

RIVER (cont'd)

Don't seem likely I'd tell 'em to you, do it? Anyone off Dyton Colony know's better'n to talk to strangers.

She picks something off Badger's lapel, looks at it, wipes it back onto him.

RIVER (cont'd)

You're talking loud enough for the both of us, though, ain't you? I've known a dozen like you. Skipped off home early, minor graft jobs here and there. Spent some time in the lock-down, I warrant, but less than you claim. Now you're what, petty thief with delusions of standing? Sad little king of a sad little hill.

After a beat...

BADGER

Nice to see someone from the old homestead.

RIVER

Not really.

(to Simon)

Call me f' anyone interesting shows up.

BADGER

(to Simon)

I like her.

ANGLE ON: JAYNE and ZOE.

JAYNE

That there? 'Xactly the kind of diversion we coulda used.

19 INT. MAL'S LODGING - PRE-DAWN

19

The furniture has been pushed to the walls. In the center of the cleared room, Inara and Mal face off, holding swords.

INARA

Attack.

He attacks, swinging the sword. She slips out of the way.

INARA (cont'd)

How did I avoid that?

MAL

By being fast like a freak.

INARA

No. Because you always attack the same way, swinging from the shoulder like you're chopping wood. You have to thrust with the point sometimes, or swing from the elbow;

MAL

Swinging from the shoulder feels stronger.

She touches his arm, adjusting his swing, controlling it. It's an intimate touch.

INARA

It's also slower, Mal. You don't need strength as much as speed. We're fragile creatures. It takes less than a pound of pressure to cut skin.

MAL

You know that? They teach you that at the whore academy?

Inara backs away, breaking the contact.

INARA

You have a strange sense of nobility, Captain. You'll lay a man out for implying I'm a whore, but you keep calling me one to my face.

(CONTINUED)

MAL

I might not show respect to your job, but he didn't respect you. That's the difference. Inara, he doesn't even see you.

INARA

Well, I'm sure death will settle the issue to everyone's satisfaction.

MAL

This < stupid > [yu bun duh] duel is the result of rules of your society, not mine.

She's angry now, waving her sword as she gestures.

INARA

Mal, you always break the rules. It doesn't matter which "society" you're in! You don't get along with ordinary criminals either! That's why you're constantly in trouble!

Mal backs away from her sword.

MAL

And you think following rules will buy you a nice life, even if the rules make you a slave.

Inara, turns away, frustrated almost to tears.

Then, Mal, avoiding her eye:

MAL (cont'd)

Don't take his offer.

Inara turns and stares at him.

INARA

What?

MAL

Don't do it. Because, in the case it comes up, that means he's the fella killed me. And I don't like fellas that killed me. Not in general.

He starts practicing again, unable to look at her.

(CONTINUED)

MAL (cont'd)

I said before I had no call to stop you. And that's true. But, anyways... don't.

INARA

I need to get back. He'll be up early.

And she exits, leaving him alone. He swings the sword.

MAL

Right. He's got that big day.

A grassy hillside at dawn would be lovely. About 15 spectators, men and women, cluster around the duelling area. Among them are a couple of Badger's lads. The crowd shifts and CHATTERS with anticipation.

Mal and Harrow stand, heads together, to one side. Harrow is smiling, Mal looks intense, adjusting and readjusting his grip on his sword. He's still wearing his dressy suit.

Atherton and his Second, another young dandy, are at the other side, talking and laughing easily. Inara stands near them, but her eyes are on Mal.

He meets her look, holds it.

The gentleman who first announced the challenge steps to the center. He raises his hands, commanding attention. Gradually the crowd quiets. He clears his throat.

GENTLEMAN

Ladies and gentlemen, the field of combat is a somber place. A man will here today lay down his life. Let the duel begin.

The last sentence is given no special emphasis, and there is no sound from the crowd. MAL doesn't even realize the fight has begun until the gentleman blends back into the crowd and Atherton steps out, smiling and handling his sword casually.

Mal steps forward, uncertain.

HARROW has moved over by Inara. They exchange a grim look.

MAL AND ATHERTON

(CONTINUED)

face off. Atherton attacks first, an easy swing that MAL parries.

MAL hits back, thrusting with the point of the sword. Atherton barely gets out of the way in time, in fact, his vest is nicked.

MAL

Best be careful, Ath. I hear these things are sharp.

HARROW AND INARA

HARROW

He thinks he's doing well, doesn't he?

INARA

He's being toyed with.

BACK TO THE FIGHT

MAL ducks to avoid a blow.

Atherton brings up his blade to deflect a blow. CLANG. While MAL hesitates, Atherton tosses his blade in the air and catches it with the other hand, showing off.

MAL gets nicked on the arm.

Atherton parries a blow away with such force it throws MAL off-balance.

Atherton steps back, and PUTS HIS SWORD BEHIND HIS BACK.

HARROW

What's he doing?

INARA

(gritted teeth)

Don't fall for that.

Mal lunges. Atherton steps to the side, the lunge goes past him. Atherton strikes, as he had planned, attacking sideways with the sword from behind his back, stabbing Mal in the side.

Inara looks stricken.

HARROW

Well, this isn't going to take long, is it?

On Mal, looking down, shocked, at his wound.

END OF ACT THREE



ACT FOUR

21 EXT. PERSEPHONE - CONTINUING 21

The crowd is more active now, sensing the end is near.

Mal fights one-handed, his left hand staunching his wound.  
He's definitely losing now.

Atherton thrusts with the sword. Mal stumbles back clumsily.

Mal lunges. Atherton steps back. Mal lunges again.

Atherton steps back again, laughing.

Atherton swings, cutting Mal's defensive arm.

HARROW

(to Inara)

We're coming up on the end, miss.  
You might not want to watch.

Mal thrusts. His sword CLASHES AGAINST Atherton's sword. MAL'S  
SWORD BREAKS. And the momentum carries Mal to one knee.  
Atherton's sword points at his chest.

INARA

Atherton! Wait!

Atherton hesitates, he may be about to get what he wants...

INARA (cont'd)

I'll stay here! Exclusive to you!  
Just let him live.

ON MAL, still down, as he registers what Inara's doing.

Mal lunges to his feet, catching Atherton under the chin with  
the hilt and throwing him back, face cut.

Atherton is regrouping, ready to move in for the kill again.  
He brings his sword arm back...

But Mal KICKS HIS BROKEN SWORD POINT OFF THE GROUND and up  
into his hand. He THROWS the broken sword point at Atherton  
like a dart!

Atherton takes the sword point in the shoulder. It sticks  
there, and Atherton, furious, reaches to pull it out.

MAL raises the hilt, still around his right hand, and brings  
it down like a gun butt, over Atherton's head. Atherton  
sprawls on the ground.

(CONTINUED)

GENTLEMAN

He's down!

MAL scoops up Atherton's dropped sword off the ground and holds it, point at Atherton's heart. He freezes there.

HARROW

You have to finish it, lad. For a man to lie beaten and yet breathing, it makes him a coward.

INARA

It's a humiliation.

MAL pulls the sword back a little.

MAL

Sure. It would be humiliating, having to lie there while the better man refuses to spill your blood. Mercy is the mark of a great man.

Very quickly, offhandedly, MAL STABS Atherton!

MAL (cont'd)

Guess I'm just a good man.

He STABS him again!

MAL (cont'd)

Well, I'm all right.

MAL grins and tosses the sword aside. Inara goes to him.

Atherton gets up slowly. The crowd draws back, whispering behind their hands.

ATHERTON

Inara! Come here!

She ignores him.

ATHERTON (cont'd)

Inara!

Harrow puts a hand on Atherton's arm.

HARROW

You've lost her, lad. Be gracious.

Atherton shakes off Harrow's hand and staggers to Inara.

(CONTINUED)

ATHERTON

You set this up, whore. After I  
bought and paid for you. I should  
have uglified you up so no one  
else'd want you.

MAL

(to Inara)

See how I'm not punching him? I  
think I've grown.

ATHERTON

(to Inara)

Get ready to starve. I'll see to  
it you never work again.

INARA

Actually, that's not how it works.  
You see, you've earned yourself a  
black mark in the client registry.  
No Companion is going to contract  
with you ever again.

HARROW

You'll have to rely on your  
winning personality to get women.  
God help you.

Inara and Mal start to walk away. Harrow joins them.

HARROW (cont'd)

You didn't have to wound that man.

MAL

I know, that was just funny.

HARROW

You willing to fight that hard to  
protect my property, I'll have it  
in your hold before midnight.

Mal nods. The deal is struck. Mal and Inara walk away, Mal a  
little unsteady.

MAL

(through pain)

Mighty fine shindig.

Morning. Badger stands with his lads. Simon talks quietly to  
Book. Jayne pours coffee for Kaylee and Wash and Zoe.

(CONTINUED)

JAYNE

(softly to Zoe)

Doc is filling the Shepherd in on the plan. We're ready to move on your signal. Doc's the diversion--

MAL (O.S.)

Did you ever see such a lazy crew?

CAMERA FINDS Mal and Inara in the doorway. Inara is helping hold him up, and he's still got a hand over his wound.

KAYLEE

Captain!

Kaylee runs to him. The others follow.

SIMON

You're hurt.

Badger approaches Mal.

BADGER

You get us a deal?

ZOE

(to Badger)

Back off, he's injured.

MAL

I got a deal. Now get off my ship.

Badger's heard all he needs to. He's a happy man.

BADGER

Ta very much for a lovely night then.

Badger exits. Inara and Simon guide Mal into a chair. The others gather around. Quickly:

BOOK

Are you badly hurt?

JAYNE

We was just about to spring into action, Captain. A complicated escape and rescue op.

WASH

I was gonna watch. It was very exciting.

23 EXT. SERENITY - IN FLIGHT - EFFECT 23

Serenity against a star field.

24 INT. SERENITY - DAY (DAY 5) 24

In the Engine Room, a grease-smudged Kaylee finishes installing a replacement engine part. Humming, she wipes her hands on a rag and heads out...

Down the hall...

Down the ladder into her quarters...

She crosses to her Cortex screen. Kaylee's Cortex has no casing. The circuitry is exposed so she can tinker with it.

Kaylee hits some keys. Nothing happens. She frowns, presses a chip more firmly into place in the machine's guts.

TINNY DANCE MUSIC plays, like the kind at the party. This is what she's been humming.

PULL BACK FROM THE CORTEX

To find Kaylee, sitting on the bed, eating some of the CHOCOLATE MINTS from the party. Pull further back to see she is looking at her party dress, which hangs from an exposed pipe.

25 INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - DAY (DAY 5) 25

Mal and Inara sit on the catwalk/balcony over the bay. Mal's midsection is bandaged. Inara wears another elegant kimono-type robe.

A bottle of wine sits between them and they drink from battered metal cups.

Inara sips her wine, makes a little face.

INARA

Thank you for the wine. It's very... fresh.

MAL

To Kaylee and her inter-engine fermentation system.

He raises his cup to toast, winces from the wound.

(CONTINUED)

INARA

Are you in pain?

MAL

Absolutely. I got stabbed, you know. Right here.

INARA

I saw.

MAL

Don't care much for fancy parties. Too rough.

INARA

It wasn't entirely a disaster.

MAL

I got stabbed. Right here.

INARA

You also lined up exciting new crime.

MAL

It is good to have cargo. Makes us a target for every other scavenger out there, a' course, but sometimes that's fun too.

INARA

(beat, then)

I am grateful, you know, for the ill-conceived and high-handed attempt to defend my honor although I didn't want you to.

MAL

Gracious as that is, as I look back, I probably shoulda stayed outta your world.

INARA

My world. If it is that. I wasn't going to stay, you know.

MAL

Yeah? Why's that?

A little disingenuous:

INARA

Oh, someone needs to keep Kaylee out of trouble.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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25            CONTINUED: (2)            25

                                 INARA (cont'd)  
                                 And all of my things are here...  
                                 Besides, why would I want to leave  
                                 Serenity?

We ARM BACK to REVEAL

The cargo bay is full of mooing milling CATTLE.

                                 MAL  
                                 Can't think of a reason.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SHOW